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Diversity by Design: A Comprehensive Implementation Plan for Inclusivity in Education K-14.

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African Studies.

by

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Diversity by Design: A Comprehensive Implementation Plan for Inclusivity K-14

by

DeDe DeDe

Masters African Studies

University of California Los Angeles, 2023

Professor Alden Young, Chair

This paper explores the historical context and current state of diversity within the Atlanta Public Schools (APS) system, emphasizing the challenges and complexities faced in achieving racial and socioeconomic integration. Tracing the evolution of APS from the post-Brown era to the present day, we analyze the impact of historical events, legal decisions, and demographic shifts on the composition of the student body. Recognizing the limitations imposed by current legal landscapes that restrict the explicit use of race as a central factor in diversity initiatives, we propose a set of race-neutral strategies to promote a more inclusive and equitable educational environment.

The dissertation of DeDe DeDe is approved

Andrew Apter

Sobukwe Okpara Odinga

Alden Young, Chair

University of California

2023

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Body

Atlanta's Achieving Diversity in Education Initiative (AADEI)

On the eighth day of deliberations, April 1, 2015, a jury convicted 11 former Atlanta Public Schools (APS) employees, including teachers, principals, and administrators, of the felony crime of racketeering. This culminated in a two-year investigation and a six-month trial, stemming from the implications of cheating on state-mandated tests to boost scores and meet achievement goals set by the district. The original findings implicated 180 employees, including 38 principals, in the scandal involving 44 schools (Blinder, 2015, April 1). Throughout this trial, questions of equality, race, schooling, poverty, achievement gaps, testing, and teacher quality were in abundance, yet as these 11 former educators who are all black were immediately handcuffed and escorted to jail, there was no mention of the role that diversity plays in education nor any indication that seeking diversity in APS serves a compelling interest.

Speaking at an event in 1984 commemorating the 30th Anniversary of the *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* case, Dr. Hamilton Holmes prophetically declared that he did not believe any schools in the country had been integrated. At the time, Dr. Holmes was a renowned orthopedic surgeon at Emory University's Medical School in Atlanta. Tracing back to Athens, Georgia, 23 years earlier, through a court order, Holmes became one of two African Americans to integrate the University of Georgia on January 9, 1961. Acknowledging the replicated value of education, he went on in his speech to differentiate between desegregation and integration, stating that "desegregation to me means that people are allowed to enter but have not been brought into the system as a whole (McCall, 1984)." He continued to note that 30 years after the

landmark *Brown* case declaring separate but equal unconstitutional, the APS has re-segregated, encompassing a student population that is 90% African American (McCall, 1984).

Looking forward, the APS has remained a predominantly black school district. Data from the Governor's Office of Student Achievement (2014) indicates that in the 2013-2014 school year, 76% of APS students were black. Though desegregated, the re-segregation of the APS has served to limit access to a system that many people of color believe was never designed for them to participate in. This access can be ascribed as social capital, where the lack of diversity in the APS limits the resources and benefits derived from the social networks and connections developed by the individuals or groups that facilitate action (Coleman, 1988). As education is an essential tenet of maintaining a singular democracy, the continuous development of a pluralistic society must be used to balance the contrasting interests of liberty and civility and the overarching goals of equity and equality.

Historical Context and Rationale

Resistance and Capitulation (The City Too Busy to Hate)

Gutman (1990) asserts that "these are difficult times because we are difficult people" (p.7). It would be disingenuous to create a plan that addresses the complex and challenging issues of diversity within the APS without considering its distinct history and the many parallels the system has shared with other historical events on the path to equality since the *Brown* decision. Through the lens of the APS and the capital developed therein, this paper will seek to create race-neutral strategies relevant to the district's milieu while adhering to it.

To the current legal landscape where race can no longer serve as the central factor in creating a diverse system.

Many districts like the APS went through a gauntlet of stages before actual desegregation would be confirmed. Despite the 1954 decision to end the dual system of schools in the *Brown* case, APS remained segregated for another seven years. This moratorium would be partly due to the *Brown* decision's lack of direction and guidelines and resistance from the city and State. Unchanged during this period, the Georgia Constitution of 1945 explicitly forbade the integration of schools, stating that “separate schools shall be provided for the white and colored races (GA Const. art. VIII, § 1).” Teachers were also dissuaded from working in integrated schools as they would not be paid per state laws (Gong, 1992).

On the heels of the 1958 *Calhoun v. Latimer* case brought against the Atlanta Board of Education by the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, it was not until 1961 that the district began to desegregate using a freedom of choice plan. This choice plan sparked the integration process, transferring black students to white schools one year and grade at a time. Under APS’ faulty interpretation of *Brown*’s “all deliberate speed” decree, integrating the schools took 12 years to complete. In the fall of 1961, nine black students merged with the APS. As stated in the article, *First School Week Ends with Normal Attendance* (1961, Sept. 2), “the nine Negro transfer students attended their four high schools without incident inside or outside the school buildings.” After the initial nine black students that integrated the district, 44 black students in 1962 and 143 black students in 1963, followed by full integration in all grade levels 11 years after *Brown* in 1964 (West, 1973).

Despite these advancements toward integration, APS remained a very segregated school district, with more than half of the schools still composed of a single race. Coalesced with the Coleman report of 1966, the 1967 Civil Rights Commission Report highlighted repetitive patterns of discrimination impacting the lives of African Americans politically, socially, and economically. With the decision from the Supreme Court in the 1968 *Green v. School Board of New Kent County*, striking down freedom of choice plans like the one in the APS while concurrently establishing the “Green Factors” to set parameters on desegregation plans and initiatives, the move from “de jure” to “de facto” within the APS was in motion beginning with the elimination of segregation among teachers.

Expanding the Scope (The Atlanta Spirit)

In alignment with the institution of cross-town busing due to the *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg* (1971) case, the district offered free transportation to black students’ schools of choice through the Minority to Majority (M&M) program. In a questionable move on July 28, 1971, Judges Sydney Smith and Albert Henderson of the U.S. District Court, Northern District of Georgia, ruled that the Atlanta school system had reached "unitary status," alluding to the removal of all vestiges of segregation in the district from the past. This was again affirmed on June 28, 1972, when the judges also rendered the transportation of 30,000 pupils unreasonable (West, 1973). After appealing APS’ unitary status distinction to the U.S. Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals in New Orleans, the case was sent back to the District Court, where a settlement referred to as the second Atlanta Compromise was reached (Research Atlanta, 1973).

Filed on February 22, 1973, the Atlanta Compromise served as a resolution to the *Calhoun v. Cook* (previously *Calhoun v. Latimer*) case. It addressed three distinct issues: student, staff, and administrative segregation. Addressing student segregation, the plan sought to increase the number of integrated schools through transportation and student assignments. Transportation issues were remedied through busing and the expansion of the M&M program. At the same time, student assignments were addressed by redrawing zone lines, closing nine schools with the addition of three new school sites in more diverse areas, and pairing four schools with opposite racial makeups. Addressing staff assignments, “the plan is expected to bring all schools in the Atlanta system to within two teachers and 10% of the overall racial composition in the Atlanta system” (Research Atlanta, p. 10). To address the final area of the compromise, “sixteen new positions would be created, and blacks would hold a substantial majority of the thirty-seven top positions in the system, including the one for the new school superintendent to be filled by the end of July. In addition, the school administration would maintain a 50-50 racial ratio for three years” (Gong 1992, 113).

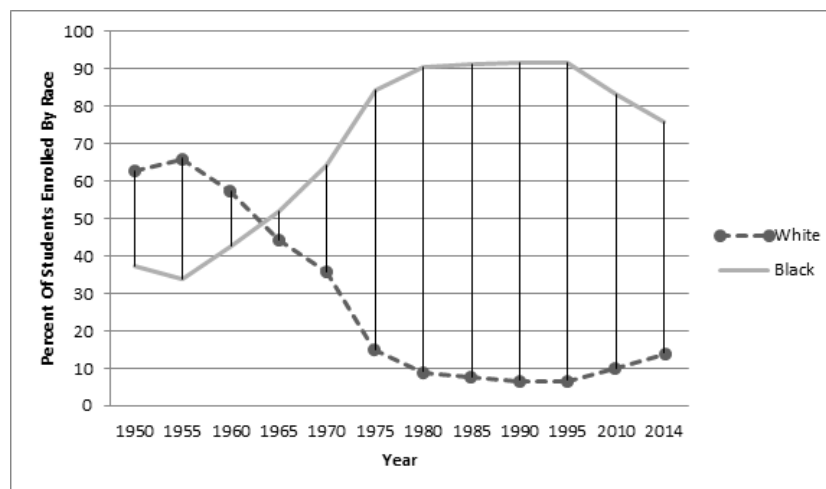


Figure 1. Atlanta Public Schools Student Enrollment Data, 1950-2014.

Though both the school board and community supported the Compromise, APS was now an entirely different school district due to white flight north of Atlanta. Blacks once represented only 33.9% of the student population during the 1954-55 school year; by the 1972-73 school year, they would account for 77.1% of the students. As the number of black students integrated into white schools increased, the number of white students in the district began to decrease exponentially, primarily through the years of 1955 and 1975 (see Figure 1).

Outcomes and Remedies (South of the North yet North of the South)

By the 1980s, APS was over 90% black, with more than 40,000 white students having left the district. The efforts of the second Atlanta Compromise through freedom of choice plans, majority-to-minority transfers, and purposeful site selection failed to integrate the school system. As the educational landscape began to shift to outcomes, the remnants of years of inequality took form in the appearance of academic achievement gaps between blacks and whites. Embedded in Bourdieu's idea of cultural capital and Colman's concept of social capital, Gamoran (2001) points to the socioeconomic differences, differential quality of schooling, and unequal expectations for the persistent racial inequalities in education preserved across generations.

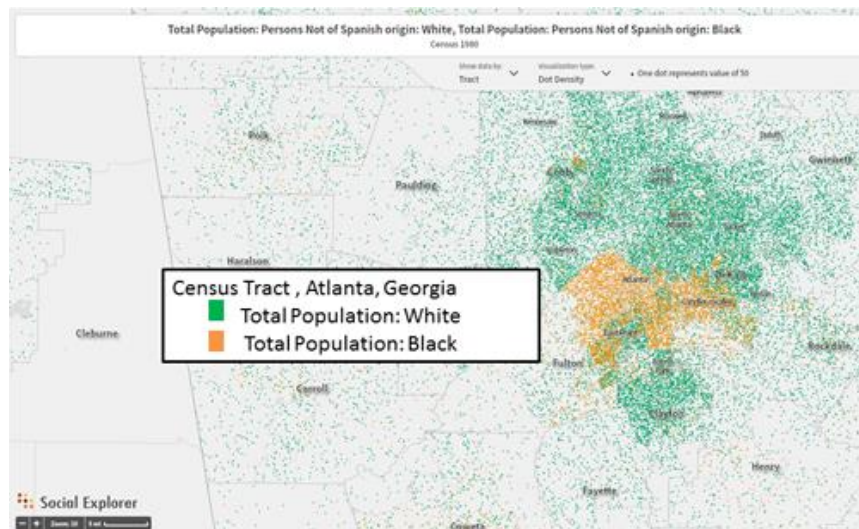


Figure 2. Mapping of Metropolitan Atlanta Population, 1980. Adapted from *Social Explorer*. 2015, Retrieved from <http://www.socialexplorer.com/6ebb72cb23/view>.

As the decade of the 1980s moved forward, whites continued to flee the city for the suburbs, increasing the clusters of the black population in the innermost parts of metropolitan Atlanta (see Figure 2). The city of Atlanta, like Hartford, Connecticut, is circumscribed by several suburbs, which served as the perfect locale for many white residents to reside in once APS passed the tipping point that usually signals the beginning of white flight. During the same period of the 1989 *Sheff v. O'Neill* case, the APS was approximately 91% black, directly mirroring the population of minority students in Hartford. Like *Sheff*, a persistent fear among many black parents resided in the belief that the lack of diversity compromised their child's "education" (Smrekar and Goldring 2009, 104). Ladd (2008) undergirds the concerns of these parents, stating, "If school desegregation had proceeded at the same rate as neighborhood segregation, the black-white gap might have narrowed" (p. 290).

The Perfect Storm (Hotlanta)

Despite achieving unitary status in 1972, APS remained in litigation through the 1990's. The issues of clearly defining how a system could achieve unitary status came to a head beginning with the 1995 *Adarand v. Peña* case involving affirmative action policies in the assignment of government contracts. Though the case was not dealing with schools, it was clear that conferring special benefits based solely on race would be considered unconstitutional under the Equal Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment (Smrekar & Goldring, 2009).

As school systems latched on to the *Adarand* case, *Freeman v. Pitts* would help ratify the APS' unitary status, concluding "that once a school system ended de jure segregation, neither the courts nor the school districts were required to remedy the de facto segregation resulting from demographic shifts" (United States Commission on Civil Rights. Georgia Advisory Committee, 2007, p.4). This statement, speaking to a district that was 91% black, confirmed for many that diversity and equality were not a priority and the existence of a dual system was acceptable among a homogenous group if established by fact, not law. Amid this storm where the use of race was subject to strict scrutiny, systems seeking to promote diversity must ensure a compelling state interest conjoined with narrowly tailored policies.

Clarity (Rise Up)

Juxtaposed in their outcomes, the 2003 *Gratz* and *Grutter* cases at the University of Michigan helped to clarify the use of race in admissions. The reservation of seats, addition of points, or use of percentages to admit students to schools receiving federal funds solely based on race was deemed unconstitutional. Districts could conduct holistic individual reviews utilizing various components to further the goal of achieving diversity. Whether by court order or

Voluntary, the 2007 *Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School District No. 1* (*PICS*) served to bookend questions of the distinct use of race in developing policies for diversity within k-14 public schools.

Given the historical background and current milieu of the APS, the *PICS* decision would create a challenging landscape for a district that is currently three-fourths black and under no court order to desegregate. Despite these facts, the benefits of diversity for students of color are profound. In the *Still Looking to the Future Manual* (2008), findings on the value of diversity in the classroom translate to success in several ways:

1. Black and Latino students perform better in integrated schools than in schools with higher percentages of students of color. Student achievement is higher (regardless of class background) when students are in classes with a higher average socioeconomic status.
2. Students in these schools' benefit from the schools' informal, integrated networks, which can aid students in attending competitive colleges or attaining a higher-status job, but which are not available even to the best students in segregated minority schools.
3. Students who attend more diverse schools have higher comfort levels with members of racial/ethnic groups different from their own, an increased sense of civic engagement, and a greater desire to live and work in multiracial settings.

While these findings share only a few documented benefits that have been researched and proven beneficial for schools with low levels of diversity, they plant a firm foundation for the APS to build on. The APS needs to do more than have racial diversity; it.

We must also seek to reap the benefits of schools that are more socioeconomically diverse as well. When sought in conjunction, socioeconomic and racial diversity may provide the best results for the academic acceleration of students in the district.

Selective Diversity Model Descriptions

Helping to ratify Justice Kennedy's assertion that diversity is a compelling interest, The Office of Civil Rights has worked to assist both K-14 and postsecondary schools develop race-neutral programs by providing myriad alternatives toward achieving diversity (Paige & Marcus, 2004). Along with The Office of Civil Rights, Bhargava, Frankenberg, and Le (2008) offer methods to assist parents, students, and schools to promote diversity and avoid racial isolation. These methods will be considered in developing race-neutral strategies that will guide the creation of this diversity in education initiative. The following race-neutral approaches are derived from their work:

Demographic Tools: Two measures using parameters other than race to promote diversity within districts and serve as a factor in student assignments include individual (family or student) and neighborhood characteristics. On a broader scale, some districts may choose to establish a diversity index that averages the features of the neighborhood. These socio-economic integration (SEI) tools can help balance a school system, ensuring a congruent percentage of low-income students are dispersed throughout the district, minimizing schools with extreme wealth and affluence and schools mired in poverty (Flinspach, Banks, & Khanna, 2003).

Mandatory Assignment: With the return to neighborhood schools as more districts were deemed unitary, re-segregation became the norm in many cities. As a tool to determine school assignments, attendance boundaries (zones) sometimes isolate students by race and class. To relieve students from this racial isolation, districts can redraw the boundary lines to include areas that differ in social and economic makeup.

New School Sites: Establishing new schools in areas that reflect a diverse population can further help diminish pockets of isolation. Though rare, the selection and placement of these schools can have replicative long-term benefits to the community.

Special Programs: Programs within schools that offer distinct and unique tracts can be an attractive alternative to students and parents. These programs, which include dedicated magnets, Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB), and dual language programs, have the benefit of pulling a diverse group of students who may not reside in the traditional zone of the school yet voluntarily choose to attend these schools increasing the diversity of the student body.

Targeted Recruitment: Establishing a diverse school population may require targeted recruitment of a specific racial group. This recruitment can be extended to students and teachers as some districts may have faculty not representative of a diverse group. A more diverse student body and staff can be obtained through mentoring programs, community outreach for students, and incentives for teachers to relocate to a particular school or district.

District Consolidation: The consolidation of several tangent school districts with

varying racial makeups can serve to increase diversity by establishing a larger, more Encompassing system. For school districts with a predominantly minority population, where other avenues will not diversify the racial makeup, consolidating with a more diverse community is an immediate remedy to racial isolation.

Inter-District Transfer Programs: Akin to district consolidations, inter-district transfers are a solution when a district primarily comprises a single race. Unlike student transfers within a single school district, inter-district transfers occur when adjacent districts collaborate to allow students to transfer voluntarily, increasing the diversity between the two.

Atlanta’s Achieving Diversity in Education Initiative (AADEI) Approach

Considering the various diversity models reviewed, AADEI’s selected approach involves a K-14 system of academically selective magnet schools for the whole school. This approach best suits the APS based on its historical past and current demographics. With tiny pockets of white students isolated in two areas of north Atlanta, the use of demographic tools, mandatory assignments, and the establishment of new school sites will not only have a nominal effect they will also serve to alienate many parents in those areas. Focusing on the racial composition of the high schools within the APS, two of the nine high schools encompass most white students, while six of the other schools have black populations above 95% (see Table 1).

Table1

Atlanta Public Schools High School Racial Composition, 2013-2014 Drilling down to the effect of segregation within the district has on the achievement and tracking of students, data indicates that there are notable differences between the two most diverse schools in the district (North Atlanta and Grady) and the remaining seven schools. Both diverse schools have the highest SAT

scores and number of students served in gifted programs while conversely having the lowest number of students receiving special education services (see Appendix A).

With precedence established in *Milliken I and II* that suburban districts cannot be compelled to pay for inequities in funding of inner-city students or be mandated to facilitate inter-district busing between city and suburban districts, the use of district consolidation and inter-district transfer programs will be problematic for the APS. Another deterrent to utilizing inter-district transfers is the lack of diversity in the adjoining counties surrounding Atlanta. With the transition of middle-class blacks to the suburbs in the 1990s, an inter-district transfer program would only serve to maintain the racial status quo.

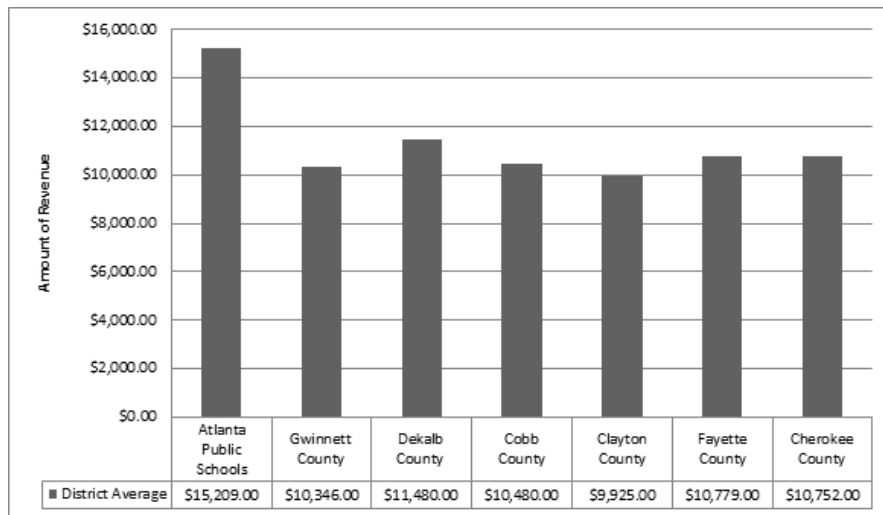


Figure 3. Per-pupil expenditure of the seven largest metropolitan Atlanta school districts, 2011. Adapted from the National Center for Education Statistics Common Core of Data. Retrieved from <http://febp.newamerica.net/k12/GA/1301110>.

In addition to the issues, the APS historically spends more per pupil than any other metropolitan district in Georgia (see Figure 3), indicating that the money and financial resources of the district are not a cause of its lack of diversity. Regarding inter-district transfers, with the establishment of Georgia’s Public-School Choice law (O.C.G.A. § 20-2-2131, also known as House Bill 251), anyone outside of the city may apply to attend school in the district with available space and payment of non-resident tuition. At a per-pupil tuition rate of \$11,531.00, many parents would deem this option farcical (Atlanta Public Schools, 2015).

The APS has a history of utilizing “magnet” programs designed as programs within a school (not whole schools). As mentioned earlier, the program within a school model proved ineffective in increasing diversity in the schools. The AADEI believes that the entire school magnet approach will provide opportunities to incorporate other components of this plan better than the other diversity models reviewed. In a climate where academic rigor and

Economic value is a pinnacle concern; the academically selective magnet model allows the AOS to bring value to families of all ethnicities (mainly white families who left the district for other schools or still live there but choose to send their children to private schools).

Magnet schools have proven to be a court-tested and accepted method of achieving diversity, as evidenced by the findings in *Morgan v. Kerrigan*, in which courts accepted magnets as a viable method for desegregation. Results indicate that magnet schools have proven limited in reducing racial isolation in the post-busing era of desegregation, where there was a heavy reliance on the magnet and parental choice without a commitment to diversity goals (Goldring & Smrekar, 2000).

Acknowledging varied success when using magnet schools to promote diversity, when analyzing the options of reducing, eliminating, or preventing racial isolation, the prevention of racial isolation was selected for this initiative. This selection is based on information collected from the Magnet Schools Assistance Program (MSAP), indicating that the prevention of racial isolation is the most successful of the three methods (Goldring & Smrekar, 2000). Extended to prevent racial isolation, the magnet school approach is designed around principles fundamental to developing a pluralistic school district. Valuing our differences, it will be the responsibility of the AADEI not to allow schools to be the testing grounds of a democracy without rules of engagement; therefore, we err on the side of guided pluralism. In this instance, mechanisms will be developed that “guide” a diverse group of students into these academically selective magnets, not leaving their enrollment up to chance.

These academically selective magnet schools will not only prioritize excellence in education, but they will also seek to reflect a more representative society. Barber (1993) speaks to the need for “educational institutions to confront the rest of society” (p. 42). No longer can education be undervalued and underplayed, nor can educators or policymakers pretend to care. If democracy through education is to be born, we must seek diverse institutions with vigor, tenacity, and enthusiasm. These schools serve to illuminate Jefferson's view of education as “an aristocracy of everyone” only constrained by “temperance and wisdom” (Barber, 1993)

Strategies for Achieving a Diverse District

This plan seeks to bring diversity (culture, background, and ethnicity) beyond race to APS. Utilizing Bhargava and Le's (2008) framework and strategies, it is understood that “no one approach (or combination of approaches) has been proven to be “better” than others. Rather, the most successful voluntary integration plans are comprehensive and often creative ones that take account of the unique geographic, demographic, historical, and political character of the community for which they are designed” (p.44).

Keys: It is in this thought process that this plan is developed, focusing on three key aspects:

1. **Academics** - elite academically selective K-14 Magnet Schools that offer rigorous and innovative programming
2. **Value** - elite magnet schools that provide private school-like atmospheres with state-of-the-art equipment and small class sizes that are tuition-free
3. **Location/Architecture** - elite schools in unique, selective, and exclusive areas, such as downtown Atlanta, office building conversion spaces, and green spaces

Goal: The goal of the AADEI is to create an Atlanta Public School system that leverages its greatest asset, its unique student base, in a more dynamic way by creating schools that foster a more significant diverse student population (socioeconomically and racially).

Finance: As research from Goldring & Smrekar (2000) indicates that “expenditures per student are 10% higher in districts with magnets” (p. 18), the AADEI seeks to receive federal approval for this voluntary desegregation plan and then apply to the Magnet Schools Assistance Program (MSAP) through the Office of Innovation and Improvement (OII) for a grant to establish and operate the schools.

Strategic Plan: Atlanta’s Achieving Diversity in Education Initiative (AADEI) is an immediate action strategic plan that aims to do the following:

1. Create an environment where academics are celebrated and delivered at the highest levels in all schools, emphasizing our newly developed Selective Academic Magnets.
2. Embrace the return of white families that have left to go to the suburbs or enroll in local private schools while embracing the middle to upper-class black families that have made similar decisions. Data from the U.S. Census Bureau: State and County QuickFacts (2010) indicates that Atlanta has a white population of 38.4 %, while in the same year, APS had a white population of only 10%. This alludes to the fact that a substantial group of white residents has children in other schools.

3. Create a ‘Come Home’ campaign highlighting the newly formed academically selective magnet schools, emphasizing the rigorous academic program, state-of-the-art facilities, small teacher-to-student ratios, and overall value add.
4. Strategically market to Atlanta’s more affluent suburbs to take advantage of the system’s open enrollment opportunities, highlighting the value and money saved in having their child attend an elite school designed and customized with the touch and feel of a private school.

To achieve the stated goals of creating schools that foster a more significant diverse student population (socioeconomically and racially), the following magnet school models will be employed (for a detailed description, see Appendix B): (a) International Baccalaureate Schools (K-14); (b) Liberal and Fine Arts Magnet Schools (PreK-14); (c) Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, & Mathematics (STEAM) Focused Magnet Schools (Pk-14); (d) School of Law, Justice, and Citizenship (6-14); (e) Early College and AP Focused Magnet Schools (6-14)

Selection Process

For each one of our academically selective magnet schools, we want to create a student population that is diverse, socioeconomically, and racially. As referenced in Table 1, there are only two high schools in the entire district with white people above 5%, and data from the Governor’s Office of Student Achievement (2014) alludes to a correlation with black students representing 76% of the student population mirroring the percentage of students receiving Free and Reduced Lunch at 77%. These facts support the use of socioeconomic factors for the Legacy Schools.

The selection process will yield a more diverse body. To accomplish this, we have developed the following selection process.

1. The magnet schools will be selective feeder schools from the newly developed Legacy Schools. Legacy Schools will be designated as any elementary, middle, or high school traditionally serving the lowest socioeconomic population.
2. Once the Legacy school candidates have been reviewed for eligibility, open enrollment of students attending APS schools for any non-legacy school in APS will be conducted.
3. After non-legacy APS students are selected, families that live within APS but have children attending non-APS schools can apply and enroll.
4. Finally, application and enrollment opportunities will be available to students attending an APS school outside the district. If students are of a diverse socioeconomic background, their transfer fee will be waived.

All students will be evaluated through a holistic, individualized process. The components of this process will seek to identify variables that will endear to greater diversity. Included in this variable are overall grades in academic coursework, the rigor of individual courses taken, trends in achievement (how the degrees were earned), a relative of position in class (actual or estimated), leadership and extracurricular activities, essay (middle and high school enrollment), and teacher recommendations. The entrance process will also include two interviews. One interview will be conducted with the student alone, and a second interview will be held with the student's parents or guardians.

Strategic Marketing

1. The Legacy schools will be visited frequently, and counselors will be asked to help recruit the most talented scholars.
2. Advertisements and notices of open enrollment will be placed on various local radio stations, the district Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) Public television station WPBA 30, and the district website. Information will also be disseminated through the district's social media outlets: Talkupaps.com, Facebook, Twitter, Youtube, Pinterest, Tumblr, and Instagram.
3. A market campaign titled 'Come Home to Atlanta' will be developed to target families that have left APS specifically, highlighting the value and rich education their children will receive in one of the elite magnet schools.

Conclusion

At the heart of this model is an understanding that, as a school community, we have an opportunity to add more than just academic value to the lives of our young people. Coleman's (1998) concept of social capital best epitomizes this value. He states that social relationships serve as resources individuals draw to realize goals. In an academically diverse and dynamic environment, our students can learn from one another and, most importantly, develop friendships and networks that open their lives to new possibilities, forming the national character in a democratic society our founders once sought. We not only believe this is a compelling interest, but we also affirm that it must be a committed goal!

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